

2009 Acura RL Elite & TL Technology

By TITUS HSU
Epoch Times Staff

The Acura RL and TL occupy the high-end echelon in the Acura sedan line-up. For the 2009 model year, both the RL and the TL have received extensive changes along with the rest of the Acura line-up. The TL Type-S has been replaced by the TL SH-AWD model, which has received the Super-Handling All-Wheel Drive (SH-AWD) system. For both the RL and TL SH-AWD, the engine power has been bumped over the 300 hp mark. The 3.7-liter engines are a little bit on the high side of gas consumption.

The RL Elite is Acura's statement on how to build as much convenience and comfort into an executive-class vehicle in the \$46,000 - \$54,000 price segment. The TL SH-AWD is the embodiment of raw Acura driving emotion, packaged nicely in a matching level of luxury. Both vehicles have received drastic makeovers to the exterior for the 2009 model year, along with the rest of the Acura line-up. The new Acura fascia design with more aggressive sweeping lines and the solid-piece chrome grill, eliminates some cluttered lines and results in a clean, bold, and elegant image. I much prefer the new look for the RL over the previous design.

This aggression and boldness theme is pushed further in TL's new look. This drastic change, however, has drawn criticisms here and there. It may just take some time to get used to the new TL; it reminds me of my initial reaction when I first saw the current Toyota Camry design.

Except for the suspension, everything about the RL is described by words like "soft," "smooth," "cushy," and "fine." In contrast, words that describe the TL are "firm," "rigid," "bold," and "solid." Two cars built with very similar specs, but two different philosophies have shaped them far apart.

The interior of the RL is spacious, classy, and comfortable. The quality cushy leather seats are bordered in by gentle lines and wood trim. In contrast, the TL interior pursues the more modern and energetic perception with very firm and supportive leather seats, enclosed by aggressive curves and metal trim. Even the steering wheels demonstrate these differences: The RL is equipped with a wood-trim steering wheel with leather grips, while the TL is equipped with an extra-thick all-leather steering wheel.

It's a given that both cars would be loaded with all the electronic wizardry one would expect in a luxury car. GPS navigation system (with voice recognition), Bluetooth connections, reverse camera, dual-zone climate control, auto-dimming mirrors, keyless entry, moon-roof, and premium audio



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system with USB connectivity and various audio format supports. The RL standard feature set and the TL Technology package further up the ante with GPS-linked sun-sensing climate control, and a comprehensive keyless access system, which links driver's seat, mirror, steering wheel, and climate control settings to individual keys. Being Acura's pinnacle in luxury features, RL Elite tops it off with even more features like cooling front seats, power rear sunshade, Collision Mitigation Braking System (CMBS), and Active Noise Cancellation. CMBS uses radar to determine the speed of and distance from the vehicle ahead, and applies braking if the closing speed exceeds the programmed threshold.

Weighing in at 4,090 lb., the

RL isn't light, but this is expected for luxury sedans in its class. This weight can be felt when accelerating and braking. The 300 horsepower engine does have the power to accelerate this car quickly, especially in Sequential Shift mode, but you would have to push on the gas pedal like you meant it. Driving casually in city traffic, the car accelerates in an easy and smooth fashion. To maintain this smooth ride, gently apply brakes early as well. The driver has a very good sense of the weight through various feedbacks, and the car corners fairly well thanks to the taut, sporty suspension and the SH-AWD drivetrain.

The SH-AWD is a very sophisticated mechanism that distributes torque over the four wheels independently. Accelerate lightly while

The CSX has a distinct combination of driving characteristics and interior amenities, and the Acura name is associated with luxury, refinement, and build quality.

turning, and the SH-AWD system kicks making it feel like the car is gliding along the curve. It is an interesting sensation. Even though it's no speed demon, the ride is smooth, refined, easy, and well-controlled. This ride complements

the sheer comfort in the cabin.

The TL doesn't drive like it weighs 3,975 lb. kg. In contrast to the RL's highly cushioned and gentle feel, everything about the TL feels firm and solid, without feeling heavy. The leather seats are really firm and offer good support. The extra thick leather-wrapped steering wheel gives the driver a direct and linear connection to the drivetrain. The feedback from the automatic gearbox through the gas pedal is one of solidity. The taut suspension holds the car up around corners; and the brakes firmly clamp down on the rotors when you press the pedal.

The TL charges forward with power from the V6 engine. Step on the brake pedal, and the calipers firmly clamp down on the rotors, bringing the car to a stop in a lin-

ear and well-controlled manner. There is little body lean around corners, and the SH-AWD also improves cornering, although you don't get the same "gliding" sensation as the RL.

I was really intrigued when I first read about the 2009 TL receiving the SH-AWD option, putting the specs really close to the new RL. Built on top of SH-AWD and marginally different engine power, Acura's philosophies for different purposes in different price segments have produced two drastically different vehicles. The RL experience bathes the occupants in an exceptional level of ease and comfort, while the TL is the manifestation of the Acura driving spirit. Both are very solid entries to compete in their respective price ranges.

Lincoln MKZ : It Captures Your Eye

By DURHL CAUSSEY

The 3.5L V-6 engine of the MKZ has 263 hp and 249 lb.-ft. of torque. This is figured on 87 octane fuel, which lifts your spirit all the more. To maximize the performance of the V-6, a wide-ratio- 6-speed automatic transmission keeps gear changing tight. The electronic controls in the engine and transmission deliver a smooth effortless shift.

Sink into the heated or cooled cabin depending on outside weather challenges, smell and feel the leather-trimmed driver seat with its 10-way power adjustments, and visualize the luxury. Maple or Ebony woods enhance the MKZ instrument panel, door trim, and leather-wrapped steering wheel. Just take away all the fancy words and you will still know that it feels good, drives "sweet," and makes you personally proud of your selection. The cabin is airy, comfortable, decked in luxury with chrome or satin-

nickel accents on all buttons, knobs and controls, and at night, white LED lighting illuminates the displays and control switches for a backlit glow.

The MKZ has a digital media player that is connected in one of two ways: to the USB port of the Lincoln SYNC media system, where you can access songs by simply saying the name of the artist you want to hear; or to the audio input jack in the center console.

Cloudy rainy weather this week in Texas didn't deter me from making social rounds in the MKZ. I let SYNC bring me the Righteous Brothers and "Loving Feelings," while songs like "Bobby Magee," and "Rainy Night in Georgia" added to my already good spirits. As traffic backed up on the interstate, Tony Bennett told me about San Francisco, and songs by the Monkeys brought back those fond memories of my youth. Sitting in my driveway, the last song I heard that day was "Blue Velvet" sung by Bobby

Vinton.

I thought how much I had changed and the world with it. I counted my blessings and all the other riches I enjoy.

Forgive me for waxing at length on a personal note. But it was the MKZ's fault. It relaxed me, made me bold, and proud to be the occupant of such a fine car.

The MKZ gets 18 mpg in the city and 28 mpg on the highway. Personally, I found I got a little better on the highway than in the city.

The base price is \$32,000, but the MKZ that I drove had a power moon roof, 17-inch chrome wheels, and a dozen or so modern features, which added another \$5000 to the price. The base price included a navigation system, which surprised me.

Durhl Caussey writes a car column read around the world. He may be reached at this paper or dcaussey@sbcglobal.net.



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